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THE PRINCIPLES OF MILITARY DECEPTION AND OPERATION QUICKSILVER

By

Allen T. Moore, MAJ, U.S. Army

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Advisor: LtCol David A. Kirkendall

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

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Abstract

This paper assesses the effectiveness of the principles of Military Deception (MILDEC) in regards to their consideration and application to Operation QUICKSILVER during the preparation for D-Day. Operation QUICKSILVER was a sub plan of Operation FORTITUDE SOUTH, designed to deceive Adolf Hitler and the German High Command as to the exact time and location of the invasion of Europe. The proper application of the six principles of MILDEC made Operation QUICKSILVER a significant accomplishment which directly contributed to the Allied triumph in the D-Day invasion.

The Allied invasion of France was critical to achieving victory in Europe and would not have succeeded without the solid employment of military deception (MILDEC). In March 1944 Allied forces launched Operation QUICKSILVER, a deception plan designed to create a fictitious army around Lieutenant General George S. Patton. Operation QUICKSILVER was the codename for an element of a much larger allied deception plan codenamed Operation FORTITUDE SOUTH, created for the sole purpose of deceiving Adolf Hitler and the German High Command as to the exact time and place of the invasion of Europe.¹ It would fabricate an entire Allied army group, supposedly commanded by LTG Patton and consist of some 1 million men.² The success of Operation QUICKSILVER would not have been possible without the diligent application of the principles of military deception during its conception and implementation.

The Allies had serious doubt as to their ability to hide preparations for a cross channel invasion. Adolf Hitler and the German High Command knew that such an invasion was coming as he forcefully stated at a conference with high ranking officers of the German military. Hitler declared "It is evident that the Anglo-American landing will and must come." How and where it will come, no one knows for sure. At no place along our long shoreline is a landing impossible, in view of the Allies' control of the sea."³ The objective of Operation QUICKSILVER would be to convince the Germans that the invasion would come to some other part of Europe so that they would fail to move combat resources to Normandy, France. Additionally, the plan was to persuade Hitler that that the main assault would be against Pais de Calais, France or the Belgian coast. QUICKSILVER also had to give the perception that the attack would come much later than was planned, so that if the Germans guessed the true objective, they may still be surprised.⁴ The effect that the Allies hoped to achieve was to create numerous threats in order to force Hitler

to scatter already scarce resources among other viable invasion sites, leaving northern and southern France relatively weakly defended.⁵

Appropriate focus and objective are vital to all MILDEC operations. Operation QUICKSILVER planners were intensely aware that these two principles would have to be carefully thought out and targeted at the principal decision makers in the German military to secure the preferred effect. In the case of Germany, the adversary decision maker capable of taking or directing the desired actions was Adolf Hitler himself. Adolf Hitler was known to personally be involved in the allocation of military resources specifically elite fighting units and strategic reserves. Additionally, it was well established that Hitler and most of his closest advisors believed that the most likely place for the Allied invasion of Europe would be in the Pais de Calais region.⁶ This perception was key to forming the objective of the deception plan, and it was fully exploited by the allied planners. According to Robert Jervis the researcher and author of “Hypothesis on Misperception”, “Actors tend to perceive what they expect.” Hitler also did not know that the Allies had broken the code to the German’s top secret encrypted communications system known as Ultra. The Allies also intercepted secret communications from the Japanese Ambassador in Berlin that confirmed Hitler’s beliefs that an invasion at Calais was exactly what he expected and what he felt was the only logical point of attack.⁷

Hitler took personal responsibility for the employment of elite panzer units, making it impossible for General of Panzer Troops, Leo von Schweppenburg to commit them without Hitler’s specific approval. Hitler would not only retain personal release authority for panzer units but thousands of troops that could be called upon to counterattack any allied beachhead.

Allied planners were aware that the focal point of QUICKSILVER should be operational deception aimed at the Germans to hold forces away from Normandy to meet a notional threat at Calais.⁸ The essential MILDEC principle of objective calls for the deceiver to cause the adversary to take or not take specific actions. In keeping with this practice, focusing the deception on Hitler was the most sensible action. Hitler would clearly have the last word and personally retained release authority to commit forces which could have brought disaster upon the allied invasion.

A deception operation must be directed and controlled by a single element to avoid information fratricide, to ensure that all elements are following the same story, and avoid conflict with other operational objectives.⁹ The MILDEC principle of security was indispensable if Operation QUICKSILVER and its parent deception operation, FORTITUDE SOUTH, were to succeed. Both Operations were strictly planned, coordinated and supervised by the London Controlling Office (LCS) and its opposite in the United States, the Joint Security Control (JSC). These entities would plan and coordinate the deception plans but not implement them. Implementation and orders execution would come from the same authorities that ordered executions of actual plans and they would be implemented by the same commands as implemented by actual plans.¹⁰ Adhering to these procedures helped remove any unforeseen confusion that may arise if commanders in the field were to have separate chains of command giving orders for actual plans and another set of orders for deception plans. The LCS purposely planned and sought approval of deception plans through the same chief planners of actual operations who would then forward the plans to the combined Chiefs of Staff. Those plans and orders would then come back through the same channels as actual plans. These efforts helped ensure unity of effort as units in the field receiving orders for deception operations would not

receive potentially conflicting orders from separate chains of command. Additionally, commanders and troops would have no reason to suspect that they were part of a deception as their orders were coming through traditional and commonly used channels. This was essential in reducing risk to operational security (OPSEC) as thousands of troops at multiple levels were simply following orders, unaware that they were part of a deception. Allied troops were purposely kept in the dark as to whether their unit was acting on deception orders for actual orders. In effect there was no difference between the two as field commanders were simply following valid and genuine orders. This was essential in maintaining the believability of the deception plan. In keeping with the paramount element of security, the enemy must not learn of the deception or it will fail. Troops needed to carry out all orders with the same tenacity as usual and they certainly may not be so inclined to do so if they knew the orders they were following were part of a deception. Further procedures were implemented to ensure information fratricide did not take place and avoid conflict with other operational objectives. The LCS stayed in constant communications and maintained a liaison with its opposite in the United States, the JSC. Weekly letters, summarizing current activity were sent to theater commanders and to the liaison officer in Washington.¹¹ The LCS also went to great lengths to maintain liaison with other government agencies in the United States and Britain to avoid conflicting operations and objectives. They regularly communicated with the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, the Army G-2, as well as MI6, MI5 and other agencies with a strict need to know. Some government agencies outside of intelligence channels were purposely associated with to help spread false rumors in neutral countries known to have German agents, as well as among the resistance in German occupied countries.

Timeliness was especially crucial in this deception plan. Operation QUCIKSILVER came into physical being in March of 1944, just three months before the invasion, however planning and coordination for the operation started in November 1943. The greater deception plan, Operation FORTITUDE SOUTH, was among the overall strategic deception plans started in July 1943, nearly a year before D-Day.¹² The Controlling Officer, COL J. Bevan, felt that the lesson that deception plans must not be rushed had finally been learned. Indeed when considering the magnitude of the Operation QUICKSILVER and the other deception plans, it would take that entire year to get the pieces in place to fully deceive Adolf Hitler. Staffs were carrying out strategic deception, tactical staffs were carrying out operations in the field, dummy units and equipment were implemented on a massive scale. The allies would also have to deceive Hitler's vast worldwide sensor network by providing each a piece of the overall puzzle. Hitler would need to be inundated with information that all pointed to the same conclusion, an attack on Calais, which he already had a predilection towards. The allied code breakers were also given adequate time with such early planning to monitor the effect of double agents and all deception efforts by eavesdropping on Ultra.

A final but very important principle of MILDEC implemented during the creation of QUICKSILVER is integration with operational planning and ensuring that it supports the commander's overall objective. QUICKSILVER created the perception that the Calais area would be the location of the real attack several weeks after the Normandy landings.¹³ GEN Eisenhower's objective was to take Normandy with minimal loss of life and to gain a foothold on the European continent. Operation QUICKSILVER would help accomplish those objectives by getting the German High Command to divert resources away from Normandy. The fictitious First United States Army Group (FUSAG) would be lead by LTG Patton. The German

command had long believed that Patton was the Allies best general and would certainly lead any attack on mainland Europe. German agents reported that Patton was the commander of the FUSAG. This action along with radio deception, fake landing craft around the ports of England, bombing of Calais beaches and communications successfully fooled the German High Command that Patton's Army would be the lead element. GEN Eisenhower told GEN Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, that the deception plan had led the enemy to prepare to meet a decisive Allied threat in Calais under Patton.¹⁴ GEN Eisenhower stated "I cannot overemphasize the great importance of maintaining as long as humanly possible the Allied threat to Calais, which has already paid enormous dividends, and with care will continue to do so."¹⁵ Operation QUICKSILVER more than met the Eisenhower's expectations and facilitate his objectives for the invasion.

Operation QUICKSILVER was an essential part of the overall deception plan to deceive Hitler. Planners of the operation implemented and monitored the principles of MILDEC at every step of its development. The plan was so successful that Hitler continued to make decisions based on his false preconception even several days after the Normandy invasion. In the book "Hoodwinking Hitler" Albert Speer was quoted concerning the extent at which Hitler believed that the real invasion was still being planned for Calais. "...Hitler remained convinced that the invasion was merely a feint whose purpose was to trick him into deploying his defensive forces wrongly...The Navy, too considered the terrain unfavorable for large scale landings, he declared. For the time being he expected the decisive assault to take place in the vicinity of Calais—as though he were determined that the enemy, too, would prove him to have been right. For there, around Calais, he had ever since 1942 been emplacing the heaviest model guns under many feet of concrete to destroy an enemy landing fleet." German intelligence and the High

Command were still reporting to Hitler that the enemy had still not committed the fictitious First US Army Group assembled in south east England.

Operation QUICKSILVER created disastrous outcomes for German defense of the Normandy beachhead. The deception tactics employed in support of Operation QUICKSILVER had a profound effect on the outcome of the allied invasion at Normandy. The plan achieved much more than any of the planners or its critics ever thought was possible. Hitler held his Panzer units in reserve for several days after the invasion at Normandy because he still believed the real invasion had not yet started. The deception was extremely successful as the German command kept fifteen additional reserve divisions near Calais even after the real invasion at Normandy had begun.¹⁶ Hitler kept thousands of men in reserve that could have likely turned the Normandy invasion into a disaster for the Allies. Operation QUICKSILVER was a brilliant plan that included depth at every level and used multiple tactics and techniques to make the deception plan believable. It was vital to the Allied success in France and ultimate victory in Europe. Critics of the plan during its inception often implied that German decision makers would never be deceived to the level desired. The tide of the war was forever changed as Hitler waited for an attack at Calais that never came.

¹ Cruickshank, Charles, *Deception in World War II*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 89.

² Breuer, William, *Hoodwinking Hitler: the Normandy Deception*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 111.

³ *ibid*, 110.

⁴ Cruickshank, 85

⁵ Cruickshank, 85.

⁶ Central Intelligence Agency: Office of Research and Development, *Deception Maxims: Fact and Folklore*, (Princeton, NJ: Central Intelligence Agency, January 1982), 14

⁷ *ibid*, 14

⁸ Holt, Thaddeus, *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War*, (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2004), 510.

⁹ Joint Publication (JP) 3-13.4, *Military Deception*, 13 July 2006.

¹⁰ Holt, 190-191

¹¹ Holt, 202-203.

¹² Cruickshank, 85

¹³ Cruickshank, 178.

¹⁴ Cruickshank, 181.

¹⁵ Cruickshank, 181.

¹⁶ Latimer, Jon, *Deception in War*, (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2001), 102.

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